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Consent and Sexualized Leisure in Sin City: Observations from a U.S. Pornography Expo in Las Vegas

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ABSTRACT

This article deploys a sexualized leisure framework to analyze the management of consent at the AVN Adult Entertainment Expo (AEE), one of the largest and longest running conventions in the mainstream U.S. porn industry. Drawing on field observations in this naturalistic setting and observers post-Expo reflections, we explore the complexities of consent in a porn tourism scene. We corroborate our qualitative analysis with survey findings ($n=433$). Taken together, our findings indicate attendees—who are largely white, straight, cis-gender men—attend AEE to socialize in a sexual atmosphere. We conclude that consent was managed, specific to a touristic sexuality. This challenges anti-porn assertions that consent is impossible or improbable in sexualized spaces.

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Gender scholar Lynn Comella (2014) argues that “studying porn cultures” illuminates how commodified sexual (re)production and consumption are deeply embedded within wider society. We contend that “porn cultures” as manifest in spaces such as pornography expos (e.g., Adult Entertainment Expo, Exxotica, and AdultCon) and film festivals (e.g., Toronto International Porn Festival and Berlin Porn Film Festival) are important phenomena worth studying in order to understand (consensual) sexualized leisure spaces in the global north. Further, studying sexualized consumption through an entertainment or leisure lens (McKee, 2012; Attwood & Smith, 2013) offers an epistemological alternative that moves scholars beyond the “negative effects paradigm” (McCormack & Wignall, 2017, also see McNair, 2014) which presumes that viewing porn results in only negative consequences (Dines, 2010; Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1998; Jensen, 2007; Jensen, Dines, & Russo, 1997; Tankard-Reist & Bray, 2012).

Examples of the negative effects paradigm are found in various studies seeking to link online porn consumption with sexism, exploitation, and violence (Dines, 2010; Jensen, 2007). Recently, U.S. politicians and activists have deemed porn a “public health crisis,” (Phillips, 2016) despite little sound scientific evidence to support that assertion (Ley, 2018). Nevertheless, the consumption of porn continues to be framed by anti-porn

advocates as a dangerous leisure pursuit. Relatedly, sexualized, interactive settings such as porn expos are also seen as another major contributor to the *pornification* of society and the deepening of gender inequality (Dines, 2010, 2011).

The overall aim of the present study is to develop a conceptual framework of the dynamics of consent within a sexualized leisure space. We do this to add empirical nuance to academic, political, and activist claims that center “negative effects.” To that end, we draw on observational fieldnotes and critical self-reflections from the 2017 Adult Entertainment Expo (AEE) in Las Vegas, Nevada, supplemented with a cross-sectional survey of AEE attendees, to explore the socio-cultural spatialities of the AEE and the management of consent between performers and fans. Consent here is understood as “a communicative act” (Kleinig, 2009: 5) of gendered interactions that maintain bodily autonomy; it relies on permission to do something that is outside expected norms of touch and talk. Analyzing the social milieus and the sexualized leisure practices that take place within the AEE, a space dominated by cisgender male patrons and female performers, provides an opportunity to explore “porn tourism,” and the formal and informal rules of engagement within political economies of commodified sexualities (Berdychevsky, 2018; Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). We present here a discussion of literature on sexualized touristic practices and spaces, followed by a brief overview of methods and the field, an attendee profile, and analyses of the geographies of this particular sexualized leisure space and what the management of consent can look like in such a space.

Literature review

Porn culture spaces such as AEE simultaneously offer the allure of ‘pleasure’ and ‘danger’, especially for the first-time visitor unfamiliar or inexperienced when it comes to public displays of performative exhibitionism by adult performers. The AEE is a distinct sexualized tourism space that elicits a particular sexualized “tourist gaze” within the much broader tourist space of Las Vegas. The concept of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen 2011) includes more than just looking, but also touching or being touched (physically or emotionally), buying, moving around, and talking. These “touristic practices” (Urry, 1990) can take place somewhere far away from ‘home’ or someplace close by that is markedly different. Although Urry (2000) never explicitly discussed the notion of consent in tourist gazes, he did theorize touch and “human sensuous practices” (79). Drawing on Urry’s work, the sexualities scholar Katherine Frank (2007) created the concept of a “touristic sexuality” found within “sex-focused vacationing” practices and discourses that employ “a wide-ranging ethos of sexuality and sexual behavior” (p. 165).

By its very nature the AEE is a hyper-sexual touristic space with contextualized norms of interaction and sexualized looking. The AEE is dominated by female performers generally dressed in revealing clothing, promoting their brand and merchandise, and there to interact with fans by chatting and posing for photos with them. Nevertheless, patrons are required to adhere to official rules of behavior set by the AEE and expected to respect any social and personal boundaries defined by performers. In other words, the AEE represents a space where ‘tacit and express consent’ (Archard, 1998) must be

constantly (re)negotiated by patrons in their interactions with performers. This applies to whether performers are working at their booths in the official Expo exhibition area and/or other spaces (e.g., bars, restaurants, stores, elevators, and walkways) within the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino where the AEE is held.

Notably, there is a lack of empirical and theoretical research on consent as a negotiated process between porn consumers/fans and performers within sexual leisure/tourism spaces such as the AEE. Some research exists exploring people's sexual behaviors and attitudes at sexually oriented adult trade shows (Comella, 2014; Voss, 2012), pornographic film festivals (Cole, 2014), and health and sexuality expos (Pitts, Smith, Grierson, O'Brien, & Misson, 2004). Jackson, Baldwin, Brents, and Maginn (2019) in a recent analysis of the gender role attitudes of male attendees at the AEE, found that they were no more sexist or misogynistic than the general U.S. male public. However, none of these studies have explicitly analyzed the management of consent or the social interactions between fans, or fans and performers, within convention spaces.

The issue of consent has come to the fore in other sexualized contexts. Notable examples in recent years, include consent in BDSM play (Langdridge & Barker, 2007; Newmahr, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2011), sexting (Crofts, Lee, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2015) and posting revenge porn (Lenhart, Ybarra, & Price-Feeney, 2016; McGlynn, Rackley, & Houghton, 2017). The issue of consent has been, and continues to be, a central tenet of debates on the human rights and labor rights of sex workers. Scholarship on consent in porn production has explored the possibilities and limits of feminist production ethics (Taormino, 2013), and the use of behind-the-scenes before-and-after interviews to demonstrate performers acknowledging and consenting to the acts they will perform (Scott, 2016), which can be thought of as 'professional' or 'occupational' consent. The construction and navigation of consent within strip clubs (Frank, 2002; Hanna, 2012) and between worker and client in the sale of sex itself (Sullivan, 2004) offer further insights into the terrain of consent in other forms of erotic labor.

Put simply, consent is very much an active and ongoing exercise within the bounds of a commodified, sexualized encounter and a sex worker retains the right to withdraw their consent at any time. At a more macro-level, the proliferation of porn clips and porn piracy, whereby content is shared or uploaded online without the express permission and knowledge of porn producers and performers, also raises questions about the dynamic and complex nature of consent (Brown, 2014; Tsika, 2017). To our knowledge, the issue of consent within an explicitly sexualized fandom space like a porn expo has yet to be subjected to scholarly scrutiny.

Methods

The field

The annual Adult Entertainment Expo (AEE), hosted by Adult Video News (AVN), takes place over four days in late January at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States. The AEE is but one of many conventions that take place throughout the year in Las Vegas which in one of the major tourist destinations in the United States. In 2017 Las Vegas had a total of 42.21 million visitors of which

6.64 million (15.8%) were there to attend a convention (Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority, 2019).

The three principal investigators (PIs) - Brents, Jackson, and Maginn - have each attended the AEE several times over the course of the last 20 years. In 2017, these three PIs plus six graduate student volunteers (3 men and 3 women) attended the AEE and, with the permission of AVN, collected data using a multi-methods strategy. Our multiple methods approach, in-depth observations, and multi-PI and multi-authorship were undertaken to augment credibility (Jensen, 2008). The IRB at the institution of the local coauthor approved all study procedures.

This article draws primarily from non-participant observations of a naturalistic setting (McKechnie, 2008), and focuses on what we term the 'micro-geographies and sociologies of the expo,' (i.e., the number and type of attendees, notable social interactions between fans and performers, and the broad spatial morphology of the different exhibition areas). Second, we draw on the research teams' post-fieldwork critically reflexive notes about their experiences of the AEE. Finally, we supplement these observational data with findings from a cross-sectional survey of AEE attendees.

Field observations

The PIs held a two-hour meeting at the local university to brief the research team the day before the Expo began. We asked them to record basic information on people in attendance from interactions to demographics, as best as they could assess, along with general observations of what was happening and where they were standing or walking around. We provided a short sheet of guiding notes asking: (1) "What's your first observation when you walk into the space?" with sub-prompts to describe the venue's size, how a room is decorated, how the space is laid out, how people navigate the space, and the general time of their observations; (2) "pick a booth or area to observe" in terms of "interactions, booth decorations, any free giveaways," or other materials that were offered at the booth (how to get them); and (3) to describe the nature of interactions/reactions amongst fans, and, between fans and performers and to document time and duration of that particular interaction.

At least one of the three PIs was on site each day of the Expo, all day, whenever team members were present. One of the PIs was staying at the hotel where the AEE took place. The PIs met the volunteer researchers on site either in the morning before the Expo started, or whichever shift they volunteered to cover. The observers tended to walk the AEE in pairs or with a PI, taking notes with pen and paper or on their phones, working for a couple hours at a time. We each wore a specially designed t-shirt with the words "Got Views on Porn? XXX Wanna Tell Me About Them?" printed on the front, and "AVN 2017 Porn Research Project UNLV, JJC, UWA" on the back along with our AEE nametags to indicate that we were part of a research team conducting fieldwork. Our observational research focused on the bigger, busier areas of the Expo.

All members of the study team submitted their observations at the completion of the Expo. We each subsequently completed a survey on our initial thoughts and observations, as well as any changes in attitudes or view as we spent more time in the venue.

The reflective survey asked two basic questions: (1) “What did you think of the Expo?” and (2) “What was the most surprising thing to you about the Expo, and why?”

The first round of coding observational fieldnotes concentrated on identifying interaction norms: (i) types of interactions (e.g., fan to fan, fan and performer); (ii) characteristics of interactions (e.g., talking, touching, laughing, admonishing); (iii) observed emotions of interactions (e.g., laughing, smiling outside of posing for a picture, moving body toward or away from someone), and (iv) the rules of engagement, which involved both unspoken and spoken rules around touching and picture taking.

Survey procedure

In addition to observations, members of the research team also recruited AEE attendees to participate in a brief online survey. The survey, hosted by Qualtrics, took approximately 30 minutes to complete and contained a series of items across several domains: (i) basic demographics of respondents; (ii) socio-sexual attitudes; (iii) general tourism activities in Las Vegas; (iv) sexual and sexualized tourist activities like visiting a strip club or paying for sex; and, (v) porn consumption attitudes and practices. Attendees were approached about the survey while they waited in line to enter the Expo. Attendees who were interested in participating were handed an electronic tablet that opened to an informed consent page and linked to the survey. Additionally, after the Expo had concluded, AVN emailed all electronically registered attendees a brief survey recruitment message and a link that directed them to the informed consent page and survey. We had 433 valid responses after removing duplicates of face-to-face surveys and surveys that were over 30% incomplete (e.g., discontinued before answering questions of interest related to this paper). Survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics using SPSS v. 25.

Findings

We found that the AEE represents a space where the interactions between patrons and performers involve varying degrees of verbal and physical indicators of consent in a sexualized or touch-based encounter. We organize our findings around three major themes. First, there is a specific socio-spatiality to the porn expo space in the sense that it tends to privilege heterosexual men’s sexualized leisure. Second, and relatedly, the space itself is saturated in a touristic sexuality, a specific kind of touristic practice. Third, the management of consent was visible, varied, and on-going. What follows here is an overview of the profile of attendees and a discussion of these three themes.

Attendee profile

Field observations highlighted the importance of articulating an attendee profile. One researcher noted: “The fans are overwhelmingly men, or women usually accompanied by men, unless talent. It is a very white space, but gets more racially diverse later in the day.” “Talent” is the term used at the Expo to refer to porn performers—stars of production company feature films and webcammers alike. Another researcher noted in terms of the age profile of attendees: “A wide age range of fans, with the youngest

Table 1. Characteristics of AEE attendee survey participants.

Sample characteristics	μ (SD) or %	(<i>n</i> = 433)
Age, years	43.4 (11.2)	–
Sex		
Male	86.1	(373)
Female	13.2	(57)
Prefer not to answer	0.7	(3)
Race		
White	69.5	(301)
Asian	12.0	(52)
Black	7.6	(33)
Native American/Pacific Islander	3.7	(16)
Multiracial	2.1	(9)
Other/unspecified	5.1	(22)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or latino	10.2	(44)
Sexual identity		
Straight/heterosexual	88.0	(381)
Bisexual	9.0	(39)
Gay or lesbian	2.3	(10)
Other/prefer not to answer	0.7	(3)
Education		
Less than a college degree	40.4	(175)
Bachelor's degree	34.2	(148)
Masters, doctoral or other post-bac degree	24.9	(108)
Unspecified	0.5	(2)
Religiosity		
Not religious	49.4	(214)
Slightly religious	24.0	(104)
Moderately religious	22.9	(99)
Very religious	3.2	(14)
Unspecified	0.5	(2)
Political orientation		
Extremely liberal	6.7	(29)
Liberal	20.1	(87)
Slightly liberal	12.2	(53)
Moderate/middle of the road	33.5	(145)
Slightly conservative	10.4	(45)
Conservative	14.1	(61)
Extremely conservative	2.8	(12)
Unspecified	0.2	(1)
Relationship status		
Single, never married	49.7	(215)
Married or civil partnership	35.1	(152)
Divorced	12.9	(56)
Widowed	1.6	(7)
Prefer not to answer	0.7	(3)
Monogamy Status		
Monogamous relationship	36.0	(156)
Dating one or more persons	28.7	(125)
Open relationship	16.4	(71)
Other/Unspecified	18.7	(81)

looking younger than 18 (17) and the oldest potentially being in their 80 s”. Another observer surmised: “In general, the fan base is heavily male dominated and the demographic overall is very white. However, the level of diversity is much higher than I anticipated: many different languages are being spoken, there is a strong female presence, is disability friendly, and a broad range of ages are represented.”

The profile of survey respondents supports these observations (see Table 1). The majority of survey respondents were male (86.1%, *n* = 373), white (69.5%, *n* = 301), identified

Table 2. AEE attendance and EXPO-related travel.

Characteristic	%	(n)
History of AEE attendance		
First time attendee	46.9	(203)
Previously attended between 2 and 4 times	33.7	(146)
Previously attended between 5 and 9 times	11.1	(48)
Previously attended 10 or more times	5.5	(24)
Prefer not to answer	2.8	(12)
Top reasons for attending AEE*		
Opportunity to meet adult performers	79.1	(307)
For the sexual atmosphere, socializing	62.1	(241)
Fan of a particular adult performer(s)	60.1	(233)
See/hear about latest industry products and/or innovations	24.2	(94)
Purchase products	21.4	(83)
Networking	16.0	(62)
AVN Awards Ceremony/Red Carpet	9.8	(38)
For the trade-related parties	7.2	(28)
Advertising	3.9	(15)
Working at the Expo	3.1	(12)
Reasons for traveling to Las Vegas (excludes locals)		
Attending the AVN expo	64.2	(278)
Vacation with friends	6.9	(30)
Attending another convention/expo in Las Vegas	6.5	(28)
Vacation with spouse/partner	4.8	(21)
Work-related trip (not related to AVN Expo/other convention)	3.0	(13)
Vacation alone	3.0	(13)
Vacation with family members	0.7	(3)
Other/Prefer not to answer	3.0	(13)

*Participants ranked their top 3 reasons for attending the AEE EXPO.

as heterosexual/straight (88.4%, $n = 365$), and the mean age of survey participants was 43.4 ($SD = 11.2$). Beyond the observable information about attendees, results from the survey indicate that, in terms of educational attainment, 40.4% of participants ($n = 175$) had earned less than a college degree. That said, almost 60% of respondents had a tertiary-level qualification; 34.2% ($n = 148$) had completed a bachelor's degree and 24.9% ($n = 108$) had a degree post bachelor's. Nearly half of participants were single and had never been married (49.7%, $n = 215$), and of those participants who reported being in a relationship (36%, $n = 156$) most were in a monogamous relationship. Close to half (49.4%, $n = 214$) reported that they were not religious, while similar proportions of the sample reported being either slightly (24.0%, $n = 104$) or moderately (22.9%, $n = 99$) religious. In terms of political leanings, a marginally larger share of respondents identified as being liberal (39.0%, $n = 169$); a third (33.5%, $n = 145$) considered themselves to be moderates/middle of the road and 27.3% ($n = 118$) identified as conservative.

The geographies of a sexualized leisure space

The AEE sprawls across several large inter-connected exhibition spaces within the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino: (i) The Joint; (ii) Muse Hall; (iii) Artist Hall; and (iv) Paradise Tower. The Adult Novelty Expo (ANE) also forms part of the overall AEE experience but this event occupies a separate exhibition space and is predominantly a business-to-business event which attracts only a small number of porn fans from the main AEE event. The Muse Hall and Artist Hall are where most of the larger porn studios and “pornpreneurs” – e.g., Brazzers and Twistys (a conglomerate); Vixen, Blacked, and

Tushy (also a conglomerate); Penthouse; Jules Jordan, Pornhub, Chaturbate and MyFreeCams – have their booths. The Joint hosts various talent agencies' meet-n-greet booths for their performers and includes other studios such as Evil Angel and online porn companies such as AEBN. The AEE is emblematic of what Maginn and Steinmetz (2015) refer to as a '(sub)urban sexscape' and what (McKee et al., 2015) term a 'pornosphere'.

There were two primary entry points to AEE inside the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, one directly adjacent to the casino floor for VIP ticket holders, and the other within a large hallway thoroughfare for general admission ticket holders. Ticket prices ranged from \$90 to over \$1,000 for one day or four-day passes, general admission, VIP, or all access VIP passes. Around 10:00 AM each day, fans began lining up at the VIP ticketholder entrance waiting to enter the Expo. Numerous ceiling-to-floor advertisements covered wall-space in the hotel/casino, featuring supersized pictures of women performers, wearing lingerie or revealing clothing, but with nipples covered. Once inside the Expo space, attendees found advertisements at booths depicting performers wearing less clothing, revealing bare breasts or even totally nude.

According to our survey, half of respondents had previously attended the AEE before (50.3%, $n = 218$) (see Table 2). Of the participants who traveled to Las Vegas, a significant majority indicated that the primary reason for their trip to Las Vegas was attending the AVN Expo (64.2%, $n = 279$). These attendees can be understood as 'porn tourists' given the purposive nature of their trip to Las Vegas. Other respondents who attended the Expo but were visiting Las Vegas for other primary reasons such as vacationing with friends (6.9%, $n = 30$) or attending a convention or expo other than the AEE (6.5%, $n = 28$) can be considered incidental or accidental porn tourists.

The space exuded a palpable sense of sexual excitement. The AEE exhibition areas consisted of various 'pornpreneurs' – studios, webcam companies, talent agencies and performers – at numerous booths of varying size and esthetic sophistication exhibiting porn, merchandise, and, of course, an opportunity to meet and get up close and personal with performers. Posters and banners advertising the AEE and performers adorned the main external entrance and throughout the interior of the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. Put simply, all the visual imagery within the AEE was designed to attract attention, curiosity and, ultimately, consumption of the space. More specifically, the space sought to elicit the gaze of heterosexual men. In addition to attracting consumers into the overall Expo space, the AEE actively encouraged attendees to interact with performers via talking and/or posing for photos with them. Posing for photos involved varying degrees of touching and even playful acts of simulated sex. The importance of this aspect of the Expo cannot be overstated. According to our survey, the opportunity to 'meet adult performers' was the most frequently endorsed reason for attending the AEE (79.1%, $n = 307$). Over half of respondents ranked 'the sexualized atmosphere in which they could socialize' (62.1%, $n = 241$), and 'being a fan of a particular performer or performers' (60.1%, $n = 233$) among the top three reasons for attending AEE (see Table 2).

While they are a major draw for attendees, interactions with performers are underpinned by a mix of formal and informal rules of engagement. Standing in line to meet-n-greet with talent and staying on the fan side of booths and the webcamming tables are formally demarcated rules of engagement. Informal rules of engagement come into

play during picture-taking and one-on-one time to talk with and touch talent. Performers who leave their booth and join fans on the floor can be generally interpreted to indicate permission to engage in a more close and personal interaction between both parties.

Crucially, although expressions of excitement and enjoyment in looking were common amongst attendees, the 'community standards' within the space are such that leery and lewd behavior is frowned upon. Crowd behavior is monitored (and influenced) by the presence of uniformed security guards located at the various entrances/exits to the exhibition spaces as well as personal security often found at the booths of the larger porn studios where the most famous porn performers tend to work. We did not observe security guards directly addressing attendees for transgressing formal or informal rules of engagement, although personal security were active, via verbal utterances or their sheer presence, in reminding attendees of the need to be orderly and respectful when interacting with performers.

Management of consent in a sexualized leisure space

The formal and informal rules of overall behavior of AEE attendees and their interactions with performers are a reminder that consent is a constant factor even in this hyper-sexualized space. For example, one observer surmised:

Actresses seem very nice and welcoming to fans and media, posing for the phone cameras and professional cameras. A fan asked Karlee Grey for several poses, to which she accepts the request. The fan goes as far as to ask 'can I grab your ass?' and she sticks out her 'ass' as an invitation for him to do so. Most fans want a hug or a selfie of them hugging the performer.

As a tourist space, the AEE offers attendees the chance to engage in a *sightseeing* tour of a *real* porn landscape as opposed to being digital tourists consuming online porn landscapes as represented by the so-called tube-sites. Moreover, attendees have the chance to move beyond mere sightseeing and engage in a kind of immersive touristic experience via direct human interaction with performers. The ease of sexualized interactions, including physical touching with performers is what many fans, especially male ones, arguably came for. For example:

The large Jules Jordan booth area is teeming with [fans/attendees] spectators, about 35 men and one woman. Three talent spread themselves out [on top of tables]. The fans watch the women pose and bend over, pausing as fans take pictures. One talent has a packet of [sour string candy] that she reaches into and stretches out her arm [over the crowd] to share with a couple fans, who each take a piece of candy. It's jovial and everyone smiles.

Talent maintained control over posing and touching. On another side of the Jules Jordan booth, a fan stopped to interact with one of the talent, who was on all fours on the tabletop:

He hoists her legs over his shoulders, they pause for the pic. She laughs while he's setting them up for the pic; they talk after. He walks away with his phone in hand [looking at the picture]. She then reaches over to hug someone who walks by, saying 'I love you, love you!' His tag identifies him as a rep from a model agency.

Within these encounters of occupationally necessitated consent, we observed unspoken and spoken rules of engagement around picture-taking, sexualization, and touching. As Kleinig (2009: 5) notes, consent “is a communicative process” grounded in varying nodes of verbal and demonstrated communication. Consent is a nuanced and dynamic process. From an activist standpoint, the term FRIES is used to illustrate the nature of consent: “Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic, Specific” (Planned Parenthood, 2017). Within the space of the AEE, touching is a normal and normalized practice. Furthermore, expression of sexual excitement and sexual feelings that are often shamed in public spaces were permitted and welcomed. The talent were active agents in managing consent and the power dynamics with attendees. Their ability to do so was complemented by the presence of uniformed and personal security as well as the code of conduct AEE attendees are expected to adhere to. In other words, consent in mediated via individual and institutionalized processes.

For example, a little before noon on Day 2, an observer watched two women – one clearly a performer – set up a small booth. The performer – Anna Bell Peaks – was distinctive looking on account of the tattoos that adorned her body, brightly colored hot pink hair and the tight white dress that accentuated her figure. The Expo was relatively quiet and less crowded earlier in the day, but men started to trickle over to Peaks’ booth and formed a line in order to meet her:

One [fan] with a camera (50+ in age, cute belly), takes a pic of her, asks her to turn around and he snaps a pic of her backside and says ‘thank you very much.’ Other men follow, waiting orderly in line – a man in a blue and yellow sports jersey with his smartphone, and, another with a suit on and a camera. Another couple of men walk over. One wants a signed picture. ‘Which would you like?’, she asks, gesturing to her glossy 8x10 pictures. He chooses one and she artfully bends over to sign it. Other men take a picture of [her suggestive pose].

Waiting in line was a boundary-marker of how and when interaction would take place. As the predominantly male attendees waited in line, any attendee that overstayed their time interacting with Peaks was skillfully guided to her DVDs for sale as a means of indicating that the meet and greet was effectively over. This is a useful example of how consent is communicative and reversible. It is also specific to the context of a sexualized leisure space:

The next fan in line sets up to take a picture with AnnaBell: He reaches around and holds her [covered] breast. She pulls the white dress down to reveal a pastied boob. He’s talking to her the whole time. He says he’s been coming for four years, says more people were here yesterday. He’s wearing black pants, is slightly balding but nice brown hair, green button-down shirt, looks business casual.

Peaks continued to meet with the men in line while a casually dressed female assistant completed transactions for DVD sales. We surmise that the assistant also served as a form of security who can intervene if a fan was to act inappropriately, though we did not observe this.

Peaks was being touched and offering sexy pictures with the crowd around her booth: this was sheer performative exhibitionism as Peaks’ role, as is the case for all other performers, was to promote her sexualized brand. There was no visible unease, on her part, about being touched or about the pictures being taken of her. Her actions can be

understood as a professional or occupation consent, in line with management of consent in other sexualized labor encounters (Taormino, 2013; Scott, 2016). With Peaks and other performers, we observed that fans, more often than not, asked for permission before touching. Performers were endowed with agency and power relative to the male attendees within the boundaries of the Expo.

Notably, however, the rules of consensual looking shifted outside the exhibition spaces of the AEE. One of the graduate student observers, in their critical reflections about the Expo, noted the following about consent, scene, and specific context:

When walking through and hanging out in the main, public areas of the [...] casino, I observed ‘high intensity male gaze’ towards the performers [from others not attending the Expo], especially when they were going to and from their rooms/signings. Conflictingly, this male gaze was ever present on the floor(s) of the fan Expo as well, but here it was different. [...] I realized the explanation largely boils down to the simple, yet often forgotten, concept of consent. Whereas in the fan Expo, there was this underlying level of consent. There was an absence of this consent in the public areas (which, critically speaking, still needs to be looked at and questioned in regards to performers’ level(s) of ability to renegotiate this on the floor [of the Expo])

In essence, consent was specific to the dynamics of the space and encounter. Sexualized leisure spaces may in fact provide a clearer understanding of the management of consent. In a sexualized leisure space where performers were selling their brand, touch and excessive looking is a sign of engagement and enthusiasm. That is what a “touristic sexuality” looks like at AEE. In a general public space, the norms of consensual looking shift. An anti-porn analysis of consent would not expect this shifting to exist; anti-porn ideology negates the option of consent in a commodified sexualized space.

Several of our researchers had concerns going into the project about their own protection and boundaries. One female graduate student observer noted in her self-reflections:

While we all try to wipe our slate of preconceived expectations and ideas before entering a field site, it is hard to deny that there is not some aspect of judgment that happens preceding: for me, I did ponder on what my experience would be like as a young woman, and whether or not I would feel a certain level of comfort (especially with the face-to-face nature of the project’s tasks). What I was extremely surprised to discover, though, was how I felt much more comfortable inside of the Expo than outside of it.

In 2016, many years after AEE was founded, it created a Code of Conduct. This may have been a response to the publicness of big-name female performers sharing their experiences of sexual assault and abuse via social media. A Code of Conduct, broadly, provides clear, formal rules of engagement and actions. At AEE 2017, this included a large sign detailing “Conduct & Behavior:”

No lewd or disruptive conduct will be tolerated. This includes encouraging lewd or disruptive conduct on the part of others. Anyone encouraging another person to expose themselves will be escorted off the premises. Any indecent exposure/nudity is illegal and will not be tolerated.

Attendees implicitly agree to this in exchange for entrance. AVN further enhanced their Code of Conduct in 2018. The AEE 2018 Show Guide explained their “Zero Tolerance Policy” against:

... physical assault/battery, stalking, unwelcome physical contact, harassing photography, photographs or recordings that violate privacy (e.g., upskirt shots, shooting in non-public spaces), offensive verbal assaults [...], harassment in public restrooms (p. 18).

The AEE Code of Conduct is part of an informed consent process. Due to the limitations of our project's methodology, the impact of the Code of Conduct on Expo attendees' behavior was unclear. However, we can say that AVN's formal creation and continued modification of rules of engagement is an example of at least recognizing consent.

Aspects of AEE that centered consent

Going further than just recognizing consent, there were some examples of centering consent at specific booths and areas in the Expo. Interestingly, it is often the marginalized aspects of sexuality where consent was more dynamic (Langdridge & Baker, 2007; Newmahr, 2011; Weiss, 2011).

The increased representation of kink/fetish porn and web-camming at the Expo are indicative of the malleability of AEE's own "charmed circle of sexuality." (Rubin, 1984) The "charmed circle of sexuality" is a longstanding concept, and one of the first theoretical concepts, to articulate how societies normalize and privilege certain sexual practices and identities such as heterosexuality and sex within marriage, while other aspects of sex and sexuality – homosexuality/lesbianism/bisexuality; sex outside marriage; BDSM; and, pornography are constructed as "abnormal" or "unnatural,". Broadly speaking, the social "outer limits" of the "charmed circle of sexuality" are simultaneously fetishized and normalized at the Expo. For example, webcam companies such as Chaturbate and MyFreeCams occupy the largest booth spaces within the Expo. This marks a notable shift over the last few years from traditional porn production companies dominating the AEE to webcamming now the dominant form of adult entertainment in this sexualized tourist space. Notably, these webcam companies use little, if any, overtly sexualized branding in their booth backdrops which tend to feature their logos. This also served to reinforce the positionality of the performers as independent workers who pay to access the platform; they are not employed by the company.

The sexual attraction of the webcam booths is, of course, the webcam performers. These performers are engaged in what we term 'dual performative erotic labor' in that they are simultaneously attracting the touristic gaze of Expo attendees in real life, and customers online via the webcam platform. Webcamming is social and interactive; the viewer can actively engage the performer. By its nature, webcamming is underpinned by an ongoing consent process, in public chat rooms and pay-for-access play-rooms.

In a sense, the AEE mirrored the socialness of webcamming. This supports our survey finding that "socializing in a sexual atmosphere" was one of the top reported reasons for attending AEE. In her study of webcamming, Angela Jones (2016) found that "In many cases, the encounters between performers and clients are not purely sexual, and given their mutual perception of safety in the digitally mediated space, a friendship can often emerge" (p.238). The rise of webcamming at AEE may indeed signify a more intimate social space for fans to come meet webcam performers in person. But this also

presented more modalities for consent as webcammers typed with fans online and spoke with and posed with Expo attendees in person.

The expressions of consent were clear in another area of sexuality represented at AEE: kink. Although kink, sexual fetishes, and BDSM have been present at the AEE for about a decade this genre of porn and sexual practice assumed a more visible presence in 2017. In addition to the dedicated BDSM ‘play space’ – *The Lair* – located separately on an upper floor within the Joint exhibition space, there were also a number of other BDSM/kink exhibitors in one of the major exhibition spaces – the Muse Hall. These exhibitors were selling leather and bondage accoutrements including floggers with long leather tassels, spanking paddles, leather gear and, ball gags. Furthermore, BDSM-lite performances conducted at these booths drew small crowds intrigued about what was going on; other people walked by throwing a casual glance. “One performer tied up [a fan on the raised booth stage area] by her and left [him] in a chair for the entirety of the observation.” The signage at the entry of *The Lair*, a somewhat secluded and quasi-privatised venue sponsored by Kink.com, one of the largest BDSM fetish production companies in the US, described it as an “interactive kinky playspace.” In this space, leather and kink vendors lined the walls, but there were also play structures where individuals could watch people get spanked/flogged, could play be a spanker/flogger, or get spanked/flogged themselves.¹ The performative interactions at *The Lair* booth are more immersive than the other BDSM spaces in the main expo:

A “white woman with dreds [is] getting flogged by a man [with] leather kilt and cap on. He use[s] a motorized dildo on her (no insertion, rubbing between legs). She stands up and takes [her] top off and is being flogged again.”

Kink and BDSM practices are explicitly centered around consent and setting boundaries (Langdridge & Baker, 2007; Newmahr, 2011; Weiss, 2011). The inclusion of kink within AEE provided implicit teaching moments about how consent is negotiated verbally before and during a play session. In addition to the verbalization of consent, including safe words to stop play, the separation of *The Lair* from the main AEE floor also constituted a form of boundary-making. In other words, the separation of this space, the signage indicating that particular types of sexuality and practices would be on display signal to prospective attendees that they have consented to experience this particular example of touristic sexuality.

Discussion

Our research project answers the call for more scholarship on pornography consumption as a leisure/tourism pursuit rather than merely a practice of visual consumption to satisfy sexual arousal and release (Attwood, 2011). The AEE represents a key node in a global network of physical porn culture spaces that attracts the touristic gaze of a predominantly heterosexual male population. As such, the AEE is a constituent element of commodified, mediated and consensual sexualized leisure – i.e., *porn tourism*. An aspect of the touristic sexuality theorized by Franks (2007) is evident at the AEE, whereby a

¹An independent journalist reported going to The Lair in 2018 to “gain a better understanding of the people within the fetish community” and videoed his experience. See “Control Freak: Part 2 - AVN 2018 - Kink and BDSM” May 25, 2018. Accessed December 11, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxyq99KLulg>

range of interactions between porn tourists and porn performers (or talent). How consent is managed is a key question, especially within the context of physical touching. As the first study to examine processes of consent within an explicitly sexualized fandom space, we assert that the publicness of porn culture and porn fandom as manifest via the promotion and advertising of the AEE on different mediums within and outside the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino facilitates explicit expressions of sexual desire and sexuality, rather than shoring up sexual shame and sex negativity.

Further, our findings offer a novel insight into the conceptualization of consent which has long been at the center of “anti/pro/critical porn studies” debates (Smith & Attwood, 2014). The AEE is fundamentally designed to facilitate social interactions between porn tourists and performers. It allows porn tourists the opportunity to see and meet porn stars in the physical world as opposed to the virtual worlds of tube-sites, clip sites, and web-camming. And, although the AEE is a hyper-sexualized space and dominated by heterosexual male tourists this did not negate the need nor the possibility to negotiate consent. A complex array of physical, social and institutional boundaries and formal and informal rules of engagement loomed ever present within the confines of the AEE during our data collection, providing norms for social interactions.

This is a study of one specific sexualized leisure context; it is not generalizable at the macro level to other sexualized leisure spaces or at the micro level to porn viewers in general. But the use of a sexualized leisure framework is transferable to other sex tourism, porn tourism, and sex vacation settings (Jensen, 2008). The depth of this study provides unique insights into sexuality, sexiness, gendered interactions, consent, and social spaces bounded within touristic sexuality. The qualitative analysis provided here scaffolds new understandings of consent in sexualized, commercialized touristic spaces.

Our study was limited by several factors: Though all members of the research team were graduate students from the local university with a background in gender and sexuality, some with a strong background in qualitative methods, we had only a short time to train the volunteer research team. Our project design did not include interviews with attendees and/or talent to corroborate and complicate the observations. What would fans and performers each say about the rules of engagement and consent? Questions of humanization, sexual desires, sexual norms, and gender norms remain: does participation in porn fandom humanize the workers? Here we think of the emotional and physical labors that talent and performers engage in at the Expo, as well as that of supporting staff (other booth workers, bartenders, security, etc.), and how talent of color navigate racial capital in a porn fan expo. Additionally, we are unable to compare the findings from our cross-sectional survey of AEE attendees to the larger population of all AEE attendees, as sociodemographic data is not gathered by AVN during event registration. We did not document how many people who were approached about the survey face-to-face declined to participate, nor can we determine how many people were reached by the AVN email that contained the survey recruitment message. As such, we cannot determine our survey response rate.

We are further limited by the homogeneity of the observers, who were all cisgender and largely white. In terms of reflexivity, without time committed to interrogating how our own identities frame what we saw and how we report it, we can only say that our observations were partial and fragmentary. Including a post-AEE reflective query helped

immensely with data analysis and became important data themselves in ways we had not foreseen. We are interested in future methodological studies or reflections exploring the roles of the researcher and researchers' bodies in sexualized leisure studies (e.g., AEE attendees eyeing researchers' nametags to figure out if we are a performer or not).

We call for additional research into how gender, sexuality, and race are wrapped up in porn-driven tourism, as it is in other forms of sex tourism/sex in tourism. For example, does the class privilege of traveling and paying for sexualized attention negate toxic masculinity? Future scholarship can also examine the possibilities and limits of a sexualized leisure framework for exploring the sociosexual gendered dynamics of public porn fandom spaces. Correspondingly, the field of leisure studies needs more research into the reversibility and freely given nature of consent in a commodified setting, particularly within a sexualized fandom scene. Finally, more research is needed to situate *porn tourism* in different geographical contexts, as current literature—including our own—focuses on countries in the global north with little reflection of why porn tourism is thriving here.

Contributions

Overall, we found that the micro-geographies and sociologies of the Expo do reveal that consent is managed, exercised, and tested in a wide variety of way, even in a hypersexualized, commodified space. In other words, assumptions that just because there is a sexualized gaze, largely directed to women, does not mean that consent doesn't exist. Our study adds to the literature that critiques anti-porn ideology as “misguided, dangerous, and wrong” (Rubin, 1993). The interactions recorded in our observations, along with the research teams' self-reflections, challenge anti-porn conceptualizations of pornified spaces as grotesque spaces of sexism that shore up violence against women. Kleinig (2009) notes that, broadly construed, morality shapes normative conceptualizations of consent; we surmise that the moral stance that porn is universally definable, violent, and repugnant disregards the complicated, negotiative thoughts and actions of both consumers and workers.

Our analysis of touch and fan engagement makes it clear that consent is an ongoing and observable process that is important to examine in sexualized leisure spaces. Our research showcases the specificity of the management of consent processes and the processes by which talent engaged with fans and each other. Ultimately, using a sexualized leisure analytic lens allowed for a nuanced examination of interactions within this specific porn tourism destination.

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